

THE BIOGRAPHER

by

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of
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Creative Writing

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The Biographer

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at George Mason University

by

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Bachelor of Arts
University of Cincinnati, 2013

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	vi
Pinprick	1
The Biographer	2
When I was One of Them	3
The Height of Winds.....	4
It is a Mystery	5
I'll Give You Fish	6
An Obituary	7
Bust	8
The Jigsaw	9
Limbo	10
Arresting Images.....	11
Wave Phenomena.....	12
An Obituary	13
Avarice	14
Supernatural Terrors	15
Lust	16
An Obituary	17
from "Behind the Candelabra".....	18
David & Bathsheba.....	19
David & Bathsheba	20
Car-ni-val	21
The Great Artist	22
The Hot Seat	23
Hey, Stranger	24
Sloth	25

Cultish.....	26
hara-kiri.....	27
Bête Noire – 1835-45; <French: literally, black beast.....	28
Red Plum.....	29
Constellations.....	30
An Obituary	31
Glenn Gould.....	32
Sergei Rachmaninoff	33
The Unreliable Source	34
The Boy on the Guitar upstairs	35
How the Young Bury Their Dead.....	36
Concertina Wire	37
Private Ceremony.....	38
The Chameleon.....	39
Hillel	40
Snowflake	42
How the Young Bury Their Dead.....	43
Crepuscle with Croon	44
Gluttony	45
An Obituary	46
Miller.....	47
Self-Portrait, 1876.....	48
Pleads to Shostakovich	49
Wrath.....	50
M.	51
An Obituary	52
Ode to Endings.....	53

ABSTRACT

THE BIOGRAPHER

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This collection of poetry conceives of a biographer as an archiver or curator of the world around them. One who invests themselves in collecting, more often than not, humorous and tragic episodes, and characters. The biographer isn't necessarily onsite, or hands-on, but often collecting through imaginative contexts, thus biographical sketching from afar. This collection accumulates the lives of real and not so real figures, obituaries, composers, mini-biographies, sinners, all in the name of the speaker's obsession and hope to better cope and better understand the world around him. The speaker collects the lives and identities of others in order to craft his own identity, that of the biographer. "The biographer," then, also shows itself as being a reflective and projective autobiography.

Pinprick

A child doesn't know what to make
Of the body he or she is in.
I close my eyes: the moon in China
Four thousand years ago, what was it doing there?
Did somebody look up and whisper
Wait, Not yet, You're doing it all wrong.

The Biographer

When I was young I'd lie to almost anyone
About a better me –
I'm listening to big things
On the record player: Mahler's first or fourth,
Or Gershwin 'Live in New York.'
I'd convince them
I could argue with the best of them –
It seems to me that Gershwin mocks Ravel.
Beethoven is crotchety and it shows.
The trouble with Bruckner? He murders you
In your sleep. In truth,
I was only halfway serious,
Never finishing my "Pride and Prejudice,"
Still willing though to cast aspersions
Like Mr. Darcy – "I must say,
Without a doubt I find the divinity
Of her company a marvelous and rare delight."

When I was One of Them

Wasn't until they were in public
The woman's scarf showed itself to be flammable.
It was quite the sight to see.
Back in her studio, one window,
No door, which she snuck in and out of for drinks,
Never a thing worth mentioning, all things evilizing,
The world coming to its close,
And she, a painter surrounded in work,
Using men for her still-lives, slipped
Them through the window, took them to the back
There to say: *hold this walrus, sycamore, peach,*
Lower your genitals down in front of those cans.

The Height of Winds

My hands quiver inside my New Year's pockets.
My attention steers off to radishes.
It is not fun today.

The bulbs in the garden,
Much like the people's faces on the street,
Are smashed in.

The wind is up my pants again.
The city administers its absinthal lizard breath.
And before the dark tonight, I'm going to swear

The bluest blue from my barstool.
Cope with it, Sherlock. Dangle the most
Intrepid colors you've got.

I believe they designed me
Without an Ariadne's Thread: meaning,
I am the coming-up-short from every success.

Bump me walking in the park one day.
My eyes on the maze. The maze on my eyes.
"It's too cold"! You'll say. "Too cold," I'll cackle.

It is a Mystery

My mother stands in the kitchen in a triangle. My father sits on a couch among many squares. Only now do I think I never thought, "I never stopped to think *why* the spaces we created." It is a memory. One winter my mom paints the stairs green. I wonder if she is sad or lonely. But a Friday night and I go out in convertibles. My dad reclines square with the television. (Now, I look at this) I wonder if my dad thought "Why is my wife painting the stairs green?" Probably not. (Now, and it is a memory) I look at these green and shining stairs.

I'll Give You Fish

Faithful as the morning.
He does not miss a single sparrow
That falls to the earth.

And how is that?
Does He see me flipping my nickel
Outside this 7/Eleven waiting for a phone call?

The Collector of Cold,
I am bored as devil's spit
With life. Yet I refuse Him?

Sparrows loosed in the Center of The Arts.
I'll chalk it up to coincidence.

An Obituary

At 10:59, regretfully foggy,
Stomach full of mutton,
His heart no more than a kick drum,
His mouth and eyes fairly erased
As if he were
A sketch someone decidedly abandoned –
A long time member of The Church
Of Where God Is Found,
He even helped in cementing
The new white chapel accommodation –
And whether or not he was aware
The mushrooms were poisonous
We will never know, but we must never
Forget the person before his mind was loosed,
Before he became not unlike those plastic bags
We sometimes see caught in a branch
On a Tuesday in the morning or after lunch.

Bust

A four-inch bust of Dmitri Shostakovich
With a broken neck and glasses chipped.

Inside the painting his head rests on a cream
-colored rug, his mouth open to a small finch.

The birds eat seed spilt from his face, then
Fly back into blurred trees like a secret gift.

A river leaks towards his ear. The trees
Will not look at him, the water just an inch

Away. The birches are skinny, depressed,
Drooped into a smear of gray for Shostakovich.

Dmitri begins a tear. The birds bathe
In it. Above the field an orange moon splits.

A moment before rain, and the neck of the bust
Forms into a nest, and the vined flowers into lips.

The Jigsaw

I stand in the rain
Like a marmalade salesman
In my best suit
In New York in the rain
But not born in New York
Born in the rain

Limbo

At the center of it all,
Where skeletons look out of front doors,
And shadows wait in their windows
Holding burning, ticking candles,
There is a knock.
Everyone runs into the ear of the skull.
Guards with pencil spears hide with caution
Behind my bottom row of boney teeth.
There are figures in the pool who do not hear a thing,
Do not know what's going on.
They float on blistering lips
In an already bubbling spat of saliva.
The morose move along the line
That ends in the river of green fat and bottles –
Where the nursery remains.
Where the Cyclops holds his woodshop.
Where within the bell tower,
A woman with a thousand skin tags
And a man with a fingernail for his genitals
Hum a Gregorian chant.

Arresting Images

In front of an Arbys
Near Zanesville, Ohio,
Police arrest a group
Of young men
From out of an Oldsmobile.

They scramble
And fight all over the yard.

In the pink above them
A single bird drifts into the cloud
Of an alligator's mouth.

Wave Phenomena

I have never been to New York. But here, I'm going to look at a wall with a window. My hair is short now, I am thirty, I am at a wall with a window. My brother's dog died today. A fifteen-year-old chocolate lab named Kazak from Kurt Vonnegut's novel *The Sirens of Titan*. His breathing labored. But it was a stable laboring. He labored at night when they slept. The decision was made. I have never been to New York. But now I'm going to look at a wall with a window. My hair is short now, I am thirty, I am at a wall with a window. The dog of space. Kazak. "This is where New York is" (pointing). Not everyone can say they have never been to New York, eaten New York pizza, or more importantly, never stayed in one of those hotels, on the top floor, or have never been the one looking out the window (pointing), looking down on different places in the city (pointing), as if to say "I have never been there for comedy, to heal my soul." "And this place over here, to have the best orange chicken." I have never died before. My hair is short now, and I am at a wall with a picture. It is of New York. It looks like a circuit board on a teardrop. This is somewhat similar to how I feel. I think. A circuit board and a teardrop. I do not know exactly how to stack these two objects. I know I do not want to drench the circuit board with the tear drop. I have never died before. My hair is short now (pointing), I am thirty. I have never been to New York. The dog of space. You are going, Kazak. I am at a wall with a window. A window with a picture of New York. A window with a picture of a circuit board on a teardrop. A weeping nervous pin. My hair is short now, I am at a wall with a dog in space moving in wave phenomena. I have never been to New York. I have never died before (pointing).

An Obituary

Nose bleed. 6'0 ft., 190 lbs.
Reading Roderick Thorp's
The Detective. Leaves behind
His dog "Francesca" and turtle
"Roberto" (animals will be rescued
At estate sale). Wife passed
2006 – broke neck eating
Dinner in a hammock. Melancholia,
Alcoholism, barbiturates.
TV LAND and TV dinners.
Arrested in 02' – exposing
Birthmark of Oklahoma
To crowd of Virginia Historians.
Intelligent, disingenuous, sly,
Remarried four times. Two
Died of natural causes – two
Missing. Platonism scholar.
Found in jogging clothes.

Avarice

The restless toad squats in the middle
Of his mud. Men in white robes
Never cease in climbing ladders
Up his face to shine
His crown. Humans licked up
By his sticky tongue, their pleas
Can be heard in his cavernous,
Ruby mouth. Other skeletons crowd
Around his feet to clean his smoker's tube.
His servants hide in the sunlight,
Crickets in the deep jungle of his furniture.
They pause in shadows,
Hold their breath, peek out
With their eyeballs eventually.
They watch the giant, nude and soaking wet,
Storm down one of his ornamented hallways.

Supernatural Terrors

Some people are taking
Their seats in the theatre of a lizard's mouth,
Strolling inconsequentially
With their popcorns
Through tensed jaws dying
To snap shut.

Eyeballs on everything.
The children's slide
Is really the tongue of a pedophile.
The cops have surrounded
The head, but the man's idea
Sneaks out of his eyeball
In the disguise of a tear.

Lust

The masturbators climb a hill
That is shed on with heavenly light,
Their right hands cut off to be there.
Gawkers who loved to look
And fantasize at bent over figures
Keep their attention on the dirt,
Offering their scooped-out eyeballs
To the celestial tollbooth figures.

Waiting on a cliff as steep and specific
As a gothic castle, those who wouldn't
Give a part of themselves away
To save the whole, witness their feet
Depart into cloven hoofs, instead of words
Bleat their objections from their
Horny mouths, as they descend
In birdcages to the snapping jaws of hell.

An Obituary

Mrs. Flounder, who once pointed
Her face to the front of her head,
Dreamt of a mountain crevice.
And others, who went and hiked the vista itself,
And those who sailed the Atlantic that year,
Claimed she no longer spoke,
Had loosed recently her family of dogs
In the North Carolinas – that
Mrs. Flounder slipped and fell,
Stirred for days, learned depression
In the evenings over time; and (seen here)
Burning fires – burns paper –
Forks her plate swiftly clean.

from "Behind the Candelabra"

Every day he swings his brief case at his phantoms.
No room for change in his glittering ears.
No smoke to remove
To clarify the *oh! I can see I'm quite typical now!*
Or *Oh my god I look like my father in drag!*
His face bandaged from the nose job twang,
His cheekbones to be: *so rich, squared,*
Exquisite! My piano tramp in all his robed boldness
Declares *this is my finger this is my hand!*
This is my thigh and this is my hip!
And this is why I love you,
My Liberace in rings, tail of peacock,
Just what are you thinking now,
Skin of goldened tortilla.

David & Bathsheba

In the disorder of this plain wall I lean against,
This wall with the spotlight burning through it,
No door to enter the future rooms where she'll be gathered,
Only her shadow in the curtain moving like two squirming eels.
I plead to whoever has made me her prisoner,
To the nut-job who painted her and keeps her from me,
At least give me a song with her voice and my name in it.
It all ends with the disorder of this lonely wall.
The spotlight burning through it.

David & Bathsheba

Hot tea for my graceful wife slumped at the piano

In her good socks and my favorite sweater.

On the record player Sibelius spins slower and a little out of tune.

I'm standing on some slanted porch among long trees in winter:

Blue lights and red lights and blue lights and red lights

Fight in each other's hair between long motherly trees.

Right in my hands everything waits: life, the plucking

Of strings, saws teething ancient wood continue to build the world:

She, right here, *ended* with her forehead down on a dissonant chord.

Car-ni-val

Miller looked up the definition of ambiguity.
Nothing was black and white.

Already shielding himself, in time
We would never speak again.

“There’s an invisible garden in your mouth”
I told him. “What will you grow”?

The street signs said no parking.
A carnival was coming to town.

Miller looked up the word *chthonic*.
We were drifting in a single direction.

The Great Artist

We tried to stop Miller from becoming
A trapeze artist.

A tight rope walker.

“You’re the kind of guy that would die,”
I told him.

The look of peace that came over his face
Devoured all previous faces.

From our third-floor balcony to the telephone pole
And back,

Transcending the cold, black night

Miller woke the neighborhood
Mid-air in his pineapple boxers.

“They’ll put your ruptured bladder in a bag,”
I screamed.

He was standing in the sky.

The Hot Seat

Miller decayed time in his waterbed
Reading Mr. Tilted Heart Magazine.

Occasionally getting up to glance
At the winter dusk, his soul blemished.

He didn't want to rehash the conversation –
The man said, “What do you do

For a living”? Kidney punch.
Miller watched himself

Shrink at the table, his clothes
Suddenly drenched and elongating.

“I'm a...I'm a...”
His lips shapeshifting into worms.

Hey, Stranger

At a diner a kind woman tells Miller
He eats like an alpha male.

His shaky hand holds a spoon of broth.
She flicks her black hair with her black fingernails

And swings it behind her shoulder.
On the front page of the day's paper

A story concerning his master plan.
Miller looks down at his befuddled shoes.

His will is small: cupcakes, milk, ~~bananas~~.
The kind woman takes him home.

She has a cat named Lil and
A ribbony white couch.

Sloth

The snail floats in a glass of scotch.
An orgy of stillness, the hands of many
Make the bed for the indolent waste
To hump itself. Its own finger
Plays in your ass or mouth.
And drags, in its own cloth of slime,
A slovenly parade
Of its own busted mucus. And oh,
The war the snail rages against the nature
Of momentum, that causes
Catastrophic holes, parallel worlds
Of emptiness.

Cultish

In a party gathered in a great room
I appear as the rest appear,
A prevalent dark red wine circle around my mouth,
My eyes dilated, tongue-slow,
So that when the curtains are thrown open at midnight
And everyone turns fantastical for moon
I do not stand out in the least bit.
At home I recognize myself in the mirror.
But this is rare, and on days like these
I resultably sashay
Through the street on my way to the evening.

hara-kiri

in the greatroom a painter
has taken her subject.

a tower gathers a crown of blackbirds.

much snow outside the chapel
makes a lip against the east wall.

under the freshest layer a spruce cone.
due to weather

several hand-carved rocking horses
sway at the edge of a sill.

“dear randy,
they’ve delayed me into evening.”

“dear paige, who has already
jumped out the window.”

Bête Noire – 1835-45; <French: literally, black beast

She straightens her hair,
While on BBC Victorian women
Fetch a coach and stretch off into the distance.

I think about muttonchops.
Strauss plays during the credits.
His waltz, in its stiffness, is horrifying.

The cat sits in the window.
I think of the air as a river,
The night as a bowl of dark broth.

She turns, and asks me about my anxiety,
Which in turn causes me to vomit
On her Indonesian rug.

I curl up in the bed.
The sheets hold a pattern of question marks.

Red Plum

I keep your center in my mouth,
Dark red as the inside of a closed eye,
Swishing you around as if I was beating you to death,
And with your body already consumed, skin and the meat
Of your existence juiced on my chin and cheeks,
Just as my kind have done in many preceding summers,
Younger summers, to both you and your bruised sisters.

We drove into the sun-burned and bilingual mother-city
Of Charleston, South Carolina, me and my piano teacher
Tapping his long arpeggio-fingers against the wheel
Of the rental car to Chopin's Etudes. He was such
A bad driver. I watched him swerve and decrease
Our chances of survival numerous times from the cool
Distance of the air-conditioning.

At dawn he pulls over to buy some fresh fruit,
And I watch him, barely awake, thinking how
This is some foreign world of ways: the car idling,
The fog standing around doing nothing specific,
The gypsies tying their dogs to the tent posts in the heat,
Him lifting one red plum after another from the baskets
And placing them in his own, building a house to devour,
His hands that could stretch fourteen keys across the board
Delicately lifting the newly plucked siblings to examine.

Constellations

like a tree uprooting from the sky
& falling sweetly for the ocean

or how an ocean grown tired of the moon
enters a sleeping city

how you squeeze a bug with the turn of your heel
and the windows burst

the mulch that smells
like pornography

& the tree walks all the way to the moon
& the man like a wounded stag in the gutter

An Obituary

Geneva tweets at the end of her story
“The world cheats me of respect.”
A teacher, a professional harpsichordist,
A two-time chess-winning mother of two,
Now all gone to waste.
How could she not become an Olympic
Swimming champion? At thirty-three now,
A white house, rich lawn, tall husband,
A plump blueberry garden, she sits
In the shade drinking lemonade. What else
Can she ask of this lovely estate? –
She knows the clouds no longer
Spell her name. She thinks chicken-sized bats
Strike her bedroom window when she
Wants to fall asleep. At Wednesday
Confession she admits
She puts a pistol to the back of her head
Each night, says to a wall, as it
Stands in the room: “Eat me.”

Glenn Gould

Calming his hands in hot water
He invents pacing and records all of Bach in a robe (not true)
He unfolds a short chair for his invisible child and sits in his lap
After auditioning fifty pianos over fifty hours
When he picks the one
He pitches the top and sleeps in its body

Sergei Rachmaninoff

I am man
Ten feet two inches
I can balance an axe on my finger
I can sleep in a mountain
And garden the valley
Or down that piano like a candy bar

The Unreliable Source

Who am I kidding? I am a white trunk snoozing in the rain.
I am a pile of homely birds shifting their weight above stoplights.
When a candle begins dying the outcome is predictable:
A nod from the Father that kicking the dead horse is fine.
I am always this close to something like that.
My faith rolls over like a drunk on a bag of chips.
Who am I kidding? A group of horses are sniffing
A carcass in a Kentucky pasture.
My lips drop from the sky as rain.

The Boy on the Guitar upstairs

I keep thinking about vacuuming
During tornadoes.

The boy on the guitar

Upstairs has caused in me tonight the desire

To return the paintings I have stolen.

If I was vacuuming during a tornado

With my back to the patio windows

There would be a tornado in the background

That I would not hear coming.

How the Young Bury Their Dead

It is often too early. The morning light
Hammers its way into the world.

The pain is water on their hearts,
The casket in their hands.

The young come out to carry the weight
Of these disappearing acts

Across the field of their mind.
There is no time to rest.

The young enter into the numb weather.
Birds crawl slowly through the sky.

Concertina Wire

Good death is never clamorous,
But gently sat down on a windy shelf,
Where a clarion sense of reasoning
And a candle in a window look over the sea and
Are a sign of some classically modeled prayer.
How much will this sweat on me,
Beat on me, sleep with me,
How long can it beat on me,
Sleep on me, bet on my body?
The sea trained fluently in luminescent death
Relieves my mind sweat.
A dim and weighty bag I must bury under gravel,
And a head I must hang for all the thoughts it unravels.
What is this? A new room of business
Before previous business is done?
“Yes sir, night and day,
This flour blossoms while this flower decays.”
“Monday comes out of its dark corner
Ready to strike like a burly fighter,
And Friday like a wet hog
Escapes beneath the legs of its killers
In some bright-lit kitchen.”
I burnish, buff, dress, gloss,
And kiss my warm breath on the sarcophagus
Of flesh-eating stone and sapwood.
Neither sapient, nor sapid, but waiting with my hands
For some Saturday night special to go off
In my clothes.

Private Ceremony

I count the days by counting the seeds,
Moving one from the pile on the left
To the pile on the right, until they read
“Your days are numbered,” until I feel a theft
Occurs containing the container of time
As I understand it.
On a table a candle draws a line
And forms a corner of anxious walls,
And the dark, and the angular gusts of winter guide
My pacing thoughts down circular halls.
The high ceiling in my mind rattles
Until from the shelf the obscure object falls.
And down it falls, miles it seems, past ladders
And webs – where an old man with a lantern
At the pitch black bottom directs the cattle home.
She is dead. Goodbye, I love you. She is dead.
Goodbye, I love you. She is dead. Goodbye.

The Chameleon

I wake up to dusty mornings
And throw out all sick bags of meat.
I comb my hair down the round back part of my head,
Tuck my shirt around my flaccid abdomen,
And greet the passing face in the mirror
As I will greet the passing faces
With falsely delightful hellos.

A murder of crows in the listless pines
As I walk to work in the morning air.
My shoes are black. My hat is black.
I wear a mosquito on my eye
That has traveled through the morning air.
I turn on Broad Street, broad indeed,
And count the veins in my wrists.
A mountain is not only a mountain
But a place for death that bosoms there.

Hillel

a dog
a hill
a sunlight
a place of vision
a blood
a body
a color set in motion
a hill
a home
a universe
a dark universe
a quiet space
a color set in motion
a set of eyes
a place of vision
a beating heart
a dog
a body
a head
a hill
a sunlight
a mind
a red tongue
a language
a blood
a row of houses
a murky light
a set of eyes
a trepidation
a hill
a head
a home
a place of vision
a hill
a quiet space
a dark universe
a Saturday
a set of eyes
a death day

a quiet day
a quiet space
a sunny day
a beating heart
a body
a mind
a hill
a dog

Snowflake

The hen is Hillel. I am still fighting myself on a daily basis. The conversations are dizzied balloons (they don't fly very high) and none present goodness or become spectacular (in terms of clarity). I'm feeling rather numb in my left leg. I'm having dreams where everyone throws their hands up because it's been announced the clock has struck the end of the world. The hen is Hillel. Hillel comes in the shape of a white and brown hen wrestling a twig still attached to the mother root after a great storm produces twenty inches of snow. The Argentinian family on the first floor cooks wonderfully, intoxicating every artistic, invisible, domestic prism in my complex, as January outside whistles in her cold high wind, and the Chick-Fil-A on the fenced-in plateau dances in its CLOSED lights, you can see this if you come over and stand on my balcony on the third floor. Unfortunately, a man (of the same family) had to go and bury my car in his snow. His snow! The surprising falcon on the railing near the entry who suddenly like some kind of spark in our peripheral spreads its great wings and flies is Hillel. "Which car is yours?" "The one you're burying." Now the man leaves his blinds open. Every time I walk toward the entry I see inside his home, which means inside his chest, inside his neurological brain structures, his music, his painterly ambitions. No furniture but great long strides of wood, and the walls wear blank (as in they do not hold pictures) but hold a color like universal milk. They do not hold pictures like one bares their wrist with no bracelet, collarbone without some neck lace, some dazzling interlace leading to a locket of the first letter of your first name. And what is your name? – I'm in a depression for six months now that makes me very sleepy. My friend gives me a brown bag full of candles with smells that collapse time and space, each evokes memory, geographical location, time of year, like pumpkin, hydrangea, bay leaf, is Hillel. I get things through by composing them in far away third persons. I blanket boats of thought with large tarps to reveal my non-purpose. This thought of going to 'I HOP' but holding off is Hillel. Talking to mom, she has a wonderful talent at flipping, so although you called to say hello, you are the one being said hello to, and the barrage of questions from the center of the universe (admit it every mother is) that range in topic, stance, color, treble begin. Mother of the universe on the other end of the phone, one moment upside down on the ceiling, then coming out of the thin neck of a vase, sitting in the kitchen chair (are you smoking, mom)? and finally unzipping herself down the center to reveal the true nature of herself in the form of a question. Did you get yourself a room at the hotel for your inebriated future self? My balcony window faces northwest and the sun sets in the west, so yes I did. So a big pink ribbon of light that exists and hangs in a coagulated fashion outside my window for you to come over and see is Hillel.

How the Young Bury Their Dead

The young have been talking with ghosts.
They go through the clothes, the sweaters

Without voices to go with them.
The young drag themselves around.

Dreams of dancing on the feet of the dead,
Of kissing the dead and being denied.

If you talk to them, they will say,
I've been in pain, I hope it doesn't show.

Crepuscule with Croon

Along the untrimmed grass at twilight
In search of this elusive Victorian painting
Of a landscape filled with rare white bat plants,
He winds up a picture in a dictionary
Next to the word *transgress* –
He becomes a witness, an initiate.
He rends himself by way of drink and babble,
And renouncement of the church –
So threadbare and remiss, a perpetuance
In the untrimmed grass.
And standing sessile, his clay pot with moss on it
Contains the basil plant
With purple blossoms in October / September.
Seven to nine doves fail at comprehending
How seed disperses from the feeder.
He realizes he's arrived *here* but originally
In some crepuscule song. It's a roar
How the mind rotates every few seconds.
I'm sure she's down in some valley
Where time and the hill and the rain shower are still,
Rallying among sweet bread and sweet clovers,
Sweet Williams, and (Delay) overall sweetness.
She's been dead exactly a month, yes,
But there's going to be bags of nuts of months,
Beds of rocks of months and
Needles and haystacks of months.
There's going to be misbehavior, for sure
Miscalculations and misapprehensions, -
Everything the opposite of mirthfulness,
But what are you going to do beyond croon?

Gluttony

I stand out in the ticket line,
Blood full of cough syrup,
My head raked over on pot.

The rules do not apply to us armless
Apple eaters. Honey roast hams.
My shoes go untied. My mind a loop.

“Happiness is incompatible
With imploding devices,”
I think a sign reads.

I drag my left foot
And throw cigarette butts.
The last bush in the world is on fire.

An Obituary

The way she leaned a chair.
The manner in which she danced
At her father's funeral. The club
Sandwich she spent ninety days
In jail for. Did anyone ever ask her
How she felt about the falling asleep
And waking up routine? –
The way her piss turned dark yellow.
Her children moved out
And SVEDKA moved in. Clumps
Of her golden hair in the shower drain.
By summer she looked like winter.
By winter she was nearly invisible. –
A broom stood on a front porch.
A floor lamp ate its dinner to the blues.
The way she took on the shape
Of a dehydrated fig tree.
The manner in which her teeth leapt
When she talked about grace.

Miller

Your name is a word
I'm wont to use
When trying to describe
A dish full of piled pears
Seized by a cloud
Of vinegar flies

Self-Portrait, 1876

Cézanne appeared, but he didn't
Want to be seen so plump
For the winter.

He called his look *the man*
En route to hot soups.

He turned,
Flabbergasting scowl,
Man of soups –

Or of some other
Inquisition on that day,
His eyes: speculative,
Of injury.

Pleads to Shostakovich

I.

Fat-heart Dmitri, dark water in the sink,
Shadow in the street lit-up
Until it's gone. Dear Mr. Hot Room,
Watch for the mirror-witch for your fantasy,
Accuse the cold white weather for dragging
Her dress too long through the month.

II.

Heavy singer, merlot lover,
Wannabe jumper at the bridge,
Untangle that knowledge into a quartet,
Squeeze out that old cloth in the brain,
Stop blackening the already blackened fish
Of your invention.

Wrath

While it is Sunday,
Despite the fatigued weather,
I have come to the flowerbeds for a silence
I do not care to acknowledge.
Presently, I wish to admit of myself
That in my life I have never felt anything
That reflected more of who I think I am.
And whether I am in debt or not
To the tangible animation
Of all the flowers all at once,
Or have sometimes left the cabins
At night, I will risk the well being
Of my name by confessing that
I have, on occasion, picked one color
From each bed and brought it to a vase,
And, on occasion, kicked-up the earth
In anger over His noisy silence.

M.

M., you might discover, pardons me often. I am looking at M. now, by the lamp, on the couch. The couch provides an elevated cushion for M. M. sips tea. I kind of see M. swimming in M.'s head. M. turns serious, looking at paintings on television. Usually, M. is simultaneous. M. is allergic to fresh vegetables. M. once took a train to Seoul. M. eats popcorn and wears a blue thingamajig I want to believe M. won at a festival. I could never see M. smoking. Seventeen birds are counted by M. in a tree. One, two, three...M. points each one out. Not at the moment, M. snores and has big eyes. Do you have plans for the future, M.? M. doesn't hear me. Am I really here, M.? I should rephrase that: M. always has big eyes. Once, M. came to the hospital in the middle of the night. When M. sings, M. raises M.'s hands in the air. M. currently will not sing. M. had M.'s appendix removed, but this is before I knew M. M.'s name actually starts with an A, but M. goes by M. No joke; M.'s name actually starts with an A. Also, M. is allergic to fresh fruit. M. eats microwaved apple. The hair on M's head hangs as natural as a bird drifting. Does that make sense? M. shakes M.'s head. M. has thin fingers. I like it when it snows around M. I like it when M. sits on the couch, here. Just what are you thinking now, M.? M. is usually simultaneous. Suddenly, I'm concerned it's impossible to sketch M. Perhaps, M. can tell.

An Obituary

I am sad to write this morning,
Person-who-glances-at-newspapers,
That tomorrow it may very well be your story
That appears in the column –
“Found beneath Brooklyn Bridge.”
It gives you the shakes. It ignites
The possibility of a story concerning your lover –
“The bread knife, on the other hand,
Embodied his fierce lust.” –
What have you done? Sweat from your brow
Drips down onto the column, dampens your collared shirt.
Oh, why did you wear this cotton shirt?
And what is this stain. Blood?

Ode to Endings

There were only three.
And the house
At once so full of life we knew
Stood breathless before the cranes.
I had never thought of that.
The world could not respond to itself.
In its own distant corner of seeing,
The bird spotted hovering like an angel.
Simple as the mirror had been in youth,
It now easily forecasted the perplexed, absorbed.
How silly it all must have been. I mean,
To have been trying so long like that.

BIOGRAPHY

Jeffrey Allen was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. He received his BA in Comparative Literature from the University of Cincinnati in 2013, where he received the Taft Senior Research Fellowship for his work on the poet James Wright, and won the Academy of American Poets prize sponsored by the University of Cincinnati. He's receiving his MFA in poetry from George Mason University, where he received the Heritage Writer Fellowship. He has poems published in Recap, New World Writing, and The Iowa Review.